



Testimony of

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Higher Education and Workforce Advancement Committee

of the

Connecticut General Assembly

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Executive Summary

Health care workforce development is impacted by multiple factors that interact in complex ways. Addressing health care workforce development requires a systems approach which means the articulation of a clear goal, the involvement of all stakeholders and the long term commitment to seeing the effort through the inevitable barriers. The Connecticut AHEC Network plays an important part in ensuring an adequate health care workforce and has demonstrated the ability to design and implement collaborative programs that effectively address health care workforce needs in the state. Connecticut AHEC seeks to restore level of funding in the amount of \$456,000 from the state legislature to support the infrastructure created by the Connecticut AHEC Network over the past 17 years.

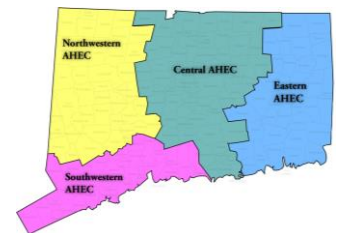
My name is Tricia Harrity and I am pleased to appear before you this evening to describe the work the Connecticut Area Health Education Center (AHEC) Network performs to ensure an adequate supply of diverse health professionals. My testimony is drawn from my 17 years of experience as the executive director of the Northwestern Connecticut AHEC.

It is imperative that funding for the Connecticut AHEC Network be restored to \$456,000. The Connecticut AHEC Network provides Connecticut residents with critical resources and programs that are both timely and essential in developing a health care workforce which is cost effective, culturally competent and responsive to the health care needs of the state.



For the past 17 years the Connecticut AHEC Network has successfully linked local communities with the resources of the University of Connecticut, its Health Center and other academic institutions and health professions training programs across the state. With the focus of supporting and developing Connecticut's health care work force, the Connecticut AHEC Network provides state-wide coverage and programming to thousands of residents through its collaboration with more than 200 community based partner organizations.

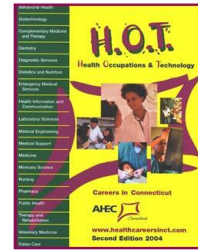
The Connecticut AHEC Network is based at the University of Connecticut Health Center and is implemented through four regional centers located in the Willimantic, Hartford, Waterbury, and Bridgeport. The four centers enable the Connecticut AHEC Network to carry out local programs with great efficiency. As a statewide program, it functions locally to provide high quality, efficient, effective and flexible services that meet local needs.



The Connecticut AHEC Network's mission and goals directly support health care workforce development in the state. Focus areas include:

- **Recruiting underrepresented minority and disadvantaged students into the health professions.** The Connecticut AHEC Network engages more than **7,000 learners annually** from 30+ secondary schools, 9 colleges/universities and 10 health professional schools state-wide. Examples of our programs include the Youth Health Service Corps, Collegiate Health Service Corp and Urban Service Track.

- **HOT Guide** - Through our on-line health careers manual (HOT Guide – Health Occupations and Technology Careers (www.healthcareersinct.com), the Connecticut AHEC Network provides current and accurate information on Connecticut based health professions programs, admissions prerequisites, training, credentialing and roles of over 85 health careers to students, parents, teachers, guidance counselors, librarians more than 1 million times each year.



- **Providing continuing education that improves the care received by vulnerable populations.** The Connecticut AHEC Network sponsored 70 continuing education offerings for the state's health care professionals with over **1,600 participants annually**. Topics included chronic disease management, immunization and public health, cultural competence, utilization of medical interpreters, Community Health Workers, etc. As part of the **Serving Those Who Served** Program, Northwestern Connecticut AHEC partnered with the Connecticut State Medical Society to provide education to primary health care providers regarding the unique mental health care needs of service members, veterans and their families.
- **Partnering with community organizations to address local health issues.** As an example, Northwestern Connecticut AHEC partnered with organizations across the state to provide **Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid** Certification to over 500 residents to improve health outcomes for people who suffer from mental illness.
- **Providing outreach to vulnerable populations.** For example, the Connecticut AHEC Network worked with **Access Health Connecticut** as Navigator organizations and hosting Assistants to educate and enroll citizens in affordable health care plans available on Connecticut's state based exchange.
- **Developing and supporting community based inter-professional training opportunities for health professions students.** For example, The Connecticut AHEC Network's **Urban Service Track** produces a cadre of well qualified health care professionals committed to serving Connecticut's urban underserved populations. Participating schools include the University of Connecticut Schools of Pharmacy, Nursing, Medicine, Dental Medicine, Social Work, and Quinnipiac University's Physician Assistant Program. Urban Health Scholars gain valuable exposure to the complex and challenging issues of health care in the inner city with a strong mentorship component supporting the scholars. The State Innovation Grant recommended the expansion of the Urban Service Track at universities across the state.



Leveraged Funding

The Connecticut AHEC Network successfully leverages fiscal support for its diverse health care workforce development programs from state, federal, foundation and private

sources. **For every \$1 of state funding, Northwestern Connecticut AHEC leverages \$1.5 from other funding sources.** For example, Northwestern Connecticut AHEC receives \$187,700 from the Connecticut Commission on Community Service at the State of Connecticut Office of Higher Education to support the Connecticut AHEC AmeriCorps Program which implements the Youth and Collegiate Health Service Corps Programs at middle schools, high schools and colleges and universities across the state. Northwestern Connecticut AHEC received \$30,000 from the Connecticut Health Foundation, Connecticut Community Foundation and the Newtown Sandy Hook Foundation to support the implementation of the Youth and Adult Mental Health First Aid Program in communities across the state. **Withdrawal of AHEC funding will seriously jeopardize our ability to attract other resources in support of programs that address health care workforce development.**

In an era of health care transformation, maintaining the \$456,000 AHEC line item in the 2016-2017 state budget is critical to assure that the Connecticut AHEC Network will be there to deliver its unique services and programs to our residents as we create the diverse, well trained and cost effective inter-professional healthcare workforce that Connecticut requires and deserves.

Request

Within its limited funding, the Connecticut AHEC Network reaches a significant number people across the state.

To be able to continue our important work, I am respectfully requesting that **AHEC funding in the amount of \$456,000 be restored** to the AHEC line item in the Higher Education and Workforce Advancement budget.

With these resources, the Connecticut AHEC Network will be able to continue to provide a statewide continuum of programs that help to ensure an adequate, diverse, culturally competent health care workforce.

Summary

Health care workforce development is impacted by multiple factors that interact in complex ways. Addressing health care workforce development requires a systems approach which means the articulation of a clear goal, the involvement of all stakeholders and the long term commitment to seeing the effort through the inevitable barriers. The Connecticut AHEC Network plays an important part in ensuring an adequate health care workforce. The Connecticut AHEC Network has demonstrated the ability to design and implement collaborative programs that are an important part of health care workforce development in the state of Connecticut. **Connecticut AHEC seeks to secure a sustained level of funding in the amount of \$456,000 from the state legislature to support the infrastructure created by the Connecticut AHEC Network over the past 17 years.**